The Sutra on Measuring and Reflecting

© Thich Nhat Hanh

Dear Friends,

Today is the 26th of March and we are in the New Hamlet in the Spring Retreat.

When we hear the sound of the bell, we should open ourselves up to allow all the generations of ancestors in us to hear the bell at the same time as we do. It means we shouldn't imprison ourselves in a shell of self – we should allow our ancestors to listen to the bell at the same time. That is our practice at that moment, because all the generations of ancestors, including our father and our mother are in us in a very concrete way - in every cell of our body. The body contains the mind – the soma contains the psyche, and we could say that the mind also contains the body. That means that the psyche contains the soma and that psyche includes feelings, perceptions, mental formations and consciousness and we should learn to see our mental formations are made out of cells, just as the body is made out of cells. The cells of the body contain the cells of the consciousness and the cells of the consciousness contain the cells of the body.

Psyche and soma are just two sides of the same reality. There isn't one that precedes the other, just like the particle and the wave are two aspects of the same reality. The wave contains the particle, just as the particle contains the wave. The reality of us is the reality of body and mind. We could call ourselves psyche and we could call ourselves soma, but in fact psyche and soma are two aspects manifesting from one reality. If we look into one cell of our body, or one cell of our consciousness, we recognize the presence of all the generations of ancestors in us – that is the truth. Our ancestors are not just human beings. Before human beings appeared we were other species. We have been trees, plants, grasses, minerals, squirrels and deer. We have been monkeys and one-celled animals and all these generations of ancestors are present in each cell of our body as well as our mind and we are the continuation of this stream of life. Therefore, when we hear the bell, it is not a separate "I" which is listening to the bell, but it is the stream, the vast stream of life, and this is the practice of no-self. We talk a lot about no-self. We could talk about it very fluently but we don't practice no-self, we just talk about it. When we hear the sound of the bell and we allow all the generations of ancestors and all our descendants, which are already present in our body, to hear it also then we are experiencing the reality of no-self which the Buddha taught. No-self is not some vague idea, but it is a reality which we carry in our very person and we only need to listen properly to the bell and we can go beyond the shell of self. We can go beyond the prison of the idea of a separate self and we allow the sound of the bell to penetrate every generation of the past and the future which is in us.

We were earlier talking about guava fruit. Even when the guava fruit is not yet ripe, it has all its seeds of future trees. When we are only 4 years old we think we can only be a child 4 years old... we can only be a little brother, but in fact we are already a mother, already a father. A little novice of 12 or 13 years old plays the role of a disciple, but he already has his own disciples in his person and he has disciples of his disciples in his person already. So when he hears the sound of the bell, the young novice must open his heart so that all the generations of ancestral teachers can hear the bell at the same time, so that all the generations of his blood family can hear the bell at the same time, and so that all the generations of his future students, in him now, can hear the bell. And if he practices like that, he is practicing 'no-self' and he is able to see the wonder of no-self and he is giving a Dharma talk on no-self. To listen to the bell like that is to hear the bell according to the highest teachings.

When we take a step on the green grass of spring, we walk in such a way that allows all our ancestors to take a step with us. our peace, our joy, our freedom, which are in each step, penetrate each generation of our ancestors and each generation of our descendants. If we can walk like that, that is a step taken in the highest dhyana. When we take one step we see hundreds and thousands of ancestors and descendants taking a step with us, and when we take a breath we are light, at ease, calm. We breathe in such a way that all the generations of ancestors are breathing with us and all the generations of our descendants are also breathing with us... if we breathe like that, only then are we breathing according to the highest teachings. We just need a little mindfulness, a little concentration and then we can look deeply and see. At first we use the method of visualization and we see, as we walk, all the ancestors putting their foot down as we put our foot down, and gradually we don't need to visualize any more – each step we take, we see that that step is the step of all people in the past.

When you are cooking a dish of food - something you have learnt from your mother or your father, a dish that has been handed down through generations of your family – you should look at your hand and smile because this hand is the hand of your mother, the hand of your grand-mother. Those who have made this dish are making this dish now and that is the truth! We are not the inventors of this dish, we are just continuing. We see our mothers hand, our grand-mothers hand, and the hands of all our ancestors making this dish. When we are in the kitchen cooking, we can realize the highest teachings – we don't have to go into the meditation hall to practice this. We have so many opportunities, the problem is – do we know how to make the most of them? We have our teacher, we have our Sangha, we have our dharma teachings, we have all the conditions that are necessary to do this and we should use these opportunities. This is not a theory, this is real experience of our daily life... it is real life.

In the past, your grandfather – did he play volleyball? No, he didn't, because in those days they didn't have volleyball... Did your grandmother go jogging every day? Did your grand-mother have the opportunity to practice dwelling in the present moment while she was walking... while she was running? When we are running we should allow our grandmother to run in us, and it is the truth that your grandmother is running in you. She is in each cell of your body. You carry all your ancestors in you when jogging, when doing walking meditation and when you are realizing the practice of dwelling happily in the present moment. Maybe other generations didn't have the opportunity to practice like this. Now we have the opportunity. We have received the practice as taught by our teachers and when we do that practice we bring happiness and joy to countless generations of ancestors, whether we're practicing walking, running, or breathing.

We have produced Plum Village in order to be able to do these things, because in the town, in the society, we don't have the right conditions to be able to walk like we do, to be able to breathe, to smile like we do, to wash clothes and to cook like we do in Plum Village. An environment where we can feel at ease, where we can do these things in a very leisurely way, in order to practice dwelling happily in the present moment. We know that many people have supported, and have brought time and energy to give us an environment where we can take steps at ease, where we can breathe in and out like this... where we can cook like this... where we can practice like this. And when we practice like this, we are doing it for all times – for the past and for the future. Thanks to our taking steps like this, and breathing and smiling and sitting like this, we are able to liberate so many generations. We liberate them by getting out of the shell of our separate self.

Western psycho-therapy aims at healing and bringing us a self which is stable and wholesome, but the psycho-therapy in the West is still caught in the idea of 'self'. Psycho-therapy in the West can bring about a little transformation, a little healing, but it cannot go very far because Western psycho-therapy is still caught in the idea of a 'self'. According to Western psycho-therapy, the family can bring about ease and peace and joy; but because of misfortune our family has not been able to bring about that. So now, how can our practice take us out of this misfortune so that we can, once again, bring back happiness and peace in our lives. Western psychology is based on the idea that we had a self that was happy and at peace and joy and we have to revive and restore that state of peace, happiness and joy that we had before. But in the light of the practice of Buddhism, for as long as we are caught in the idea of a separate self, ignorance is still in us – in our body and in our mind. Therefore, the practice of no-self is the most wonderful way to heal. Practicing no-self is to get out of the narrow idea of the self, to see the intimate relation between what is self and what is not-self. That way, ignorance is healed and all the suffering, the anger, the jealousy, and the fear, will disappear, and the fruit which is achieved is a thousand times greater than the healing which is based on the idea of a separate self.

We are people who have problems... psychological problems, and we ask ourselves questions like – "*Who am I? When my mother and father came together, did they want me to come into this world or did they just come together and I was the result... rather like a misfortune, an accident... Did they want to have me or did I just appear as an accident? My mother and father came together in a thoughtless way and because of that I came into this world...*" If I think like that, I will suffer. There are people who say, "*When I came into this life did my parents want to keep me or did they want to destroy me – did they want to have an abortion?*" Many people suffer when they think that their parents may have wanted to have an abortion. "*Who am I? Was I wanted? What is the meaning of my life?*" We are inclined to ask questions like that and when we try and answer those questions we suffer because we are caught in an idea of a separate self. When a young child grows up and if he knows that in the past, his mother had wanted to have an abortion, that child will suffer a lot. He knows that his parents didn't want to have that child and it was an accident that the

child was born and if the child knows that, he will suffer very much and that suffering will bring about illnesses. How will the psycho-therapist be able to help that child? "*Does my life have a meaning? Where do I come from? Who am I*?" These questions can be the source of abnormalities, of sufferings in the life of a person, but if we look deeply, according to the way the Buddha taught, we can see the reality of no-self and we will no longer ask questions like that. This is one of the essential points which we learn in the *Sutra on the Middle Way*. First of all we see that we are a continuation of a stream of life. Whether our parents wanted us or not is not so important. Maybe our father and mother didn't want us, or didn't want us yet, but our grandparents and our ancestors wanted us to come into life and that is the truth. The truth is that our ancestors, our grandparents, always want a continuation. If it's not this generation, it will be the next generation. There are always generations who want us to be their continuation and if we can answer that way, then the child will not suffer from thinking their parents didn't want them, because any parents have their ups and downs – their good moments and their not-so-good moments. Sometimes they are full of love and sometimes they are full of anger, and this love and anger is not the only thing that they have. It is not only from them, but from all generations and when we can see that their love and their anger comes from all generations, we no longer blame our parents. We see that our parents have good things as well as very unwholesome things.

In the East, we are forced to someone to marry someone we hate and we say*, "Why do our parents make us marry this person we don't like*?" But after we have lived with this person for two or three years, we discover that the person they made us marry is very likeable and we thank our parents – we see that our parents had a certain wisdom in judging that person to be a good husband and they had a good reason to allow this coming together to happen. We all have friends, who in the beginning we didn't like at all - we hated them! When we saw that person we hated them so much, but after a while we discover that person is a very good friend and therefore that moment of hatred is not everything. It is just a moment; it is not eternal and after that moment of hatred there are moments of great love and therefore hatred and love are just on the surface. Deeper than that is something else and when we can see that, we are not sad and we don't say things like – "*Do my father and mother love me or not?*", because maybe, at one point during the pregnancy, they didn't want me, but after I was born they loved me very much and they are very happy I was born. So we see we are our father and mother. We see we are our grandparents and when we get out of the shell of self we are no longer made to suffer by the question "*Was I wanted*?" Therefore, when we study Buddhism and practice according to the no-self teachings of Buddhism, we are able to liberate ourselves and also liberate numberless generations of ancestors and descendants in us.

In our childhood we may have been through stages of great difficulties. We have been wounded, we have had traumas and we generally do not want to remember those stages of suffering. In us there is a protective defense mechanism, we want to defend ourselves against our suffering. Every time we are in touch with the experience of suffering, we cannot bear it and therefore the thing called "defense mechanism" tries to hide these things deep down in our unconscious mind and when someone comes along and digs up these sufferings, we cry, we weep, we are sorrowful and we cannot eat for a couple of days. But running away from our suffering is not the best way to deal with it. Therefore, in Buddhism we are taught that we should practice mindfulness. We should produce the energy of mindfulness and return and embrace the young child who is wounded in us. That young child can have been very heavily wounded – very severely wounded, but because, for many decades, we haven't had the strength to deal with it, we have tried to run away from that suffering. We have not dared to face it and therefore the wounded child in us continues to suffer and is asking for care and love, but we do the opposite – we run away. We are always running away, because we are afraid of suffering and therefore the method of Buddhism is to practice in such a way that we produce the energy of mindfulness and with the energy of mindfulness we are no longer afraid. We are able to return and we are able to recognize that child in us. We are able to embrace that child in us and we are able to talk to that child in us. When we have the energy of mindfulness we have the capacity to embrace that child like we would embrace a young brother or sister who has been wounded and we say, "*I have, in the past, left you alone – I have gone away from you... now I am very sorry. I am going to embrace you*.." We have to embrace that child and, if necessary, we have to cry together with that child perhaps while we are doing sitting meditation. We have to talk to that child with the language of love... We can go into the forest and do that. We can call that child a little sister or little brother.

Among us there are people who have practiced this and after a period of practice there has been a diminution of their suffering and a transformation. After that, the relationship between that person and their brothers and sisters and friends become much easier, because they have come back to themselves and healed the wounded child in themselves. The people around us, our brothers and sisters, may also have a severely wounded child in them and we can help them if we have managed to help ourselves. And therefore, after we have healed ourselves, we see the relationship between ourselves and others has become much better, much easier. We see more peace, more love in us. In Buddhism, we see that that wounded child is not just us... not only us. It may also be our mother, because our mother has suffered throughout her life. Our father has suffered, and our mother and father did not meet the Dharma in order to be able to look after the wounded child in themselves and therefore, that wounded child in us <u>is</u> our mother who has been wounded as a child. So when we are embracing the wounded child in us, we are embracing all our mothers of generations in the past – all the wounded children of our past generations. This practice is not a practice for ourselves alone, but it is a practice for numberless generations of ancestors and descendants. Therefore, when we are able to embrace the child who has been wounded in us, we are able to embrace our mother and our father. Maybe our father and our mother had suffered and the baby, the child, in them has not yet been looked after, not yet been healed, and so we heal the wounded child in us for our father, for our mother, and for our grandparents. If we don't do it now, when will we do it? Now we have our teacher. Now we have our friends. Now we have our Sangha... and we don't do it, so when will we do it? The years and months we spend in Plum Village are not to give us knowledge, to form us in Buddhist studies, because Plum Village is not a university for us to come and receive the heap of knowledge which, later on, we will take with us in order to get a job or in order to teach to others. Plum Village is a place where we are able to practice embracing and transforming the wounded child in us. In us, the wounded child is always there, is always waiting, and we have abandoned it. Now we have to return to her and recognize her; accept her presence, embrace her, weep with her, and with the energy of mindfulness, heal her. And in the light of the *Sutra on the Middle Way*, we know that this child, who has been wounded, is not just us, but it is also the child of other generations. It is the wounded child of our mother, the wounded child of our father, the wounded child of our grandparents and when we practice, we practice for all our ancestors.

Where is that child? That child is lying in each cell of our body. There is no cell of our body which does not have that wounded child in it. The cells of our consciousness and the cells of our body. Our consciousness is made of cells and in each cell of our consciousness, of our mental formations, that wounded child is there – abandoned, severely wounded. We don't have to look for that child a long way away in the past... 3 million years ago. We don't have to look for that child in our childhood or in the time of our great-grandparents because all the truth of that wounded child, all the suffering of that wounded child is lying, right now, in the present moment, in each cell of our body and our consciousness. We just have to go back to ourselves and be in touch and we will see all of this. You are inscribed in each cell of your body and your mind. You don't have to go back to the past, that child lies in the present. The wounds, the suffering, the sadness... it is present in every cell of your body just as the awakened wisdom of your ancestors, of the Buddha, the happiness of the Buddha, is also present in every cell of your body. You should know how to return to it and make use of it – these elements of happiness, of awakened wisdom, in order to produce the energy of mindfulness and embrace the child who has been wounded. The wounds, as well as the happiness, are in each and every one of your cells. The Buddha, the ancestors, and the teachers have handed down this awakened wisdom that is lying in each cell of your body. You just need to return, with your breathing and your steps to produce the energy of mindfulness and wisdom and that energy will embrace and heal you, and it will heal the wounded child in you.

We are people who have ignorance in each cell of our body and our mind. That ignorance is called *Avidya*– lack of clarity. It means the "inability to see" things which are just lying there, we don't know that they're there. *Avidya*– no seeing, no clarity. This term is in Buddhism, it means lack of light, lack of insight, lack of seeing... That wounded child is lying there and we don't even know the wounded child is there. The wounded child in us is a reality, but we can not see it and that inability to see it is called ignorance. This child has been severely wounded. It really needs us to return to it and accept it, to embrace it, but we don't know that it's there and we are running away from it. That attitude – if you don't want to use 'ignorance'... what do you call it? We are looking to make money, making profit, but at the same time we are not aware of what is really happening in us, and that ignorance brings about energies that make us sick. In each cell of our body, each cell of our consciousness, there is this ignorance. It is like a drop of ink in a glass of water. That ignorance is in each cell of our body. It stops us from seeing reality and it pushes us in the direction of darkness so that we do things which are foolish and which make us suffer even more and which makes the wounded child in us even more wounded. That energy of darkness is called 'impulse' and everyday our impulses push us to do things, to say things, which are ignorant because the basis of our impulses is ignorance. We are sad, we are angry, we blame, we are jealous... all these things are the energy of impulse and the basis of that is ignorance. These impulses – we do not see them. They lie in our consciousness. Our consciousness is 'wrong' consciousness. It is full of ignorance and impulse.

Buddhist psychology has two parts. One we talk about is 'mind consciousness' and the other is 'store consciousness'. In Western terms we talk about the 'unconscious' and the 'subconscious' and in Buddhism these two things are contained in the *Alaya* consciousness, the store consciousness. We push our severely wounded child down into those regions. The deeper, the better. The child is calling, crying out for help from those places, but we don't hear and all this is ignorance and therefore, ignorance has brought about our present consciousness. In each cell of our body and in every

cell of our consciousness, we have the subconscious and the unconscious, and the energy of them pushes us to live our daily life superficially and foolishly, bringing about more and more suffering for ourselves and those who live around us. Therefore, what we are learning in the practice is - from ignorance, to make clarity. How can we have light in the darkness? We are walking in the dark, so we do things opposite to what we want to do and we know that we want light. Light means being able to light up a lamp and we have to take that light out of our body and our consciousness. Because, in our body and our consciousness, not only is there ignorance and impulses, but there is also awakened understanding because we have been handed down the seeds of understanding by our ancestors. The thing is... we never use them! Buddha has handed them down to us; our teacher has handed down to us; we receive them and we hide them away. We store them away and we don't use them. It is like we have a lamp which we never light up and that lamp is called mindfulness and the oil of that lamp is our breathing, our steps, our smile, our working in mindfulness. We have to light up that lamp. Light up the lamp of mindfulness and the light will shine out and the darkness will cease, will dissipate.

When light is there, there will not be ignorance and when ignorance retreats, these impulses are no longer produced because clarity brings about a different energy which is called '*bodhicitta'*. The great aspiration – the 'mind of love' - it is also energy, just like impulses are energy, but this is an energy with light in it and impulses are full of darkness. When we have lit up the lamp, we have a different energy than when we are in darkness. That is the energy of understanding, of *bodhicitta*, and when we have the energy of *bodhicitta* already, our consciousness is illumined and so it's called '*prajna'*, 'wisdom'. Wisdom and consciousness have the same basis, but we can talk about consciousness only when it has ignorance in it, but when consciousness is lit up by *bodhicitta*, we no longer call it 'consciousness', we call it wisdom, *prajna*, understanding. If we have the wisdom of *bodhicitta* in each cell of our body and of our consciousness, there is happiness. We have a 'manifestation' body – *Nirmanakaya*. We still have eyes, ears, nose, tongue and body, but in each cell there is love, there is *bodhicitta*, there is wisdom and understanding. Therefore, the key of the practice is to light up the lamp. We have a gatha which is very good... whenever we turn on the light, we say, "*Lighting up the candle, I make an offering to all the Buddhas, the numberless Buddhas, to lighten up the face of the earth*." Before I light the lamp, I breathe and I say this gatha. I see that the ignorance of my mind gives way to the light of my mind. In our mind, there is the light of understanding and in the room, there is the light of the lamp. It is not enough just to turn on the light, because if you just turn on the light, or light the candle, that is only an outer light. We have to turn on the inner light, the light of mindfulness. So when the young novice has just become a monk, he has to learn these poems so that every time he lights the lamp, he can light up understanding in his heart as well. If he doesn't do that, however many times he turns on the light in the room, he will never change the darkness in his mind into the light of his mind.

When we can say that we have forgotten the wounded child in ourselves, we feel great compassion for that child. We see how we have to practice our breathing and our mindful walking in order to be able to be stable enough to embrace that child, to comfort and heal that child. If the light of mindfulness is great, if it is clear, if it is sufficient, we will see that that child is not just ourselves, but it is also our mother, our father. Our mother and our father have suffered and they have not had the opportunity to embrace the child in them, so we are doing it for them. Because the wounded child in us is also our father, is also our mother... ask yourself – is there any understanding that is greater than that understanding? We talk a lot about understanding, but is any understanding higher than the understanding of Buddhism? When we can smile, we know we are smiling for our mother and our father, we know we are liberating our mother and our father. If we practice like that then the questions which make people suffer – *"Who am I? Did my mother really want me? Did my father really want me? What meaning does my life have*?" - all those questions become meaningless. In the *Sutra on the Middle Way*, the *Sutra on Interdependent Arising*, and the *Sutra on Great Emptiness,* we will see that if we can only practice, we will be able to go beyond these questions which make people suffer so much–.– We don't need those sufferings any more.

We don't need to go to Ireland or go to China to find our roots. We don't need to go back to the old native land. We just need to be in touch with every cell in our body. We can find out it's because of father, mother and all of our ancestors who are present in a very real way in each cell of our body. Even the bacteria are our ancestors, and the awakened understanding has been transmitted to us from all generations and all the sentient beings, but also insentient beings – so-called beings without feelings – have their own wisdom. Scientists today talk about life as matter which is inert. Before there was life this world, this universe, was a kind of... in the West we call it 'primordial soup'... from which everything came. All the neutrons, electrons, the inert matter, became living matter. It began to be a fungi, an amoeba, and then fish. They always use the word matter, because they have been influenced into thinking that in the beginning there was just matter, there was just soma. They don't see that matter contains spirit. Object of perception is also perception. The thing which they call matter - the object of our perception - is also perception, so it is also mind. So mind contains matter and matter contains mind. They are two faces of the same reality, sometimes something manifests as matter and sometimes something manifests as mind. The elementary particle can be called a wave or it can also be called a particle, because sometimes it appears as a wave and sometimes it appears as a particle, it is both things. You would say *"Something cannot be both form – both particle and wave – those two things... how can they be one?"*, but in fact, these two things are one. We are both father and child, sometimes we manifest as father and sometimes we manifest as child... or mother. As soon as the guava fruit is born, it has guava seeds in it, so it is already a mother or a father.

So this is 'thinking matter', they say that human beings are 'thinking matter'. The matter now has thinking in it or thinking manifests from matter. Scientists say that there was a stage when human beings first stood up, they no longer crawled along, and they call the human species at that time 'homo erectus'. Then afterwards they had a kind of man called 'homo habilis', and then 'homo sapien', and 'homo sapien' is the thinking matter. Now we have another expression, 'homo conscious', which means the human being who is aware, who is mindful. A human being who knows – "I will get sick... I will grow old... I will die...", that is a person who is aware and because of that awareness, that person suffers more. That awareness brings about anxiety and fear, called 'anguish', and this brings about ill health. People ask, "Do other species have less awareness and therefore do not have the suffering of thinking 'Oh, I will get old, I will die' ", If other species do have that awareness it is a slight awareness. if they get sick, they get sick and they don't have to worry about getting sick. But because human beings have this 'anguish', we have questions of philosophy, like "Who am I? What will happen to me?", we have the kind of questions that people sometimes asked, as recorded in the Sutras, "Did I exist in the past? If I did exist in the past, what kind of animal was I? Was it a beautiful animal? Was it an ugly animal.... Was I a frog? Will I exist in the future, and if I exist in the future, what kind of animal will I be? Will I have a beautiful face? Will I have a long tail?" All these questions that we ask come from this anguish and it brings about a lot of illness.

Did my parents want me? Was it an accident that I was born? Does anybody love me? All those questions make us suffer so much! And they come from our thinking - from this anguish, but the capacity to be aware – that is, the human being who is mindful – that is what will save us. That awareness will help us to know that the environment of this planet belongs to all species and will help us to realize that the human species is destroying the environment. When people are aware of these sufferings... they have come from political oppression... have witnessed injustice in society... When people can really see these things, they have the capacity to stop what they are doing and to help others to stop in order to go in a different direction which will not destroy our planet. Our awareness brings about our anxiety and our anguish, but if we know how to use that awareness, that mindfulness, we will be able to see the state we are in and we know what we should do and what we should not do in order to be able to transform and bring about peace and happiness and life for the future. The Buddha was one of the most beautiful people of the human species who we call 'homo conscious'. We have the homo erectus; the homo habilis (the skillful man), and we have the homo sapiens – (the thinking man). But now we have the expression 'homo conscious', (the aware man). It is an expression which has been used by people – it was not invented by me.

So when we are having a meal, we should eat in such a way that allows leisure, ease and happiness, because it is really a deep practice to eat together. Just as with your breathing and working, eat in such a way that your ancestors can eat with you. Your father eats with you, your grandfather and grandmother eat with you. Sit at ease, like someone who has no problems, no anxiety. The Buddha taught us that when we eat we should not allow ourselves to be lost in meaningless thinking and conversation. We should dwell in the present moment to be deeply in touch with the food and the Sangha around us. Eat in such a way that we are happy, at ease, that we have peace, so that each of our ancestors and descendants in us can benefit. In former times, when I was 4 or 5 years old, every time my mother went to the market, she brought me back a cake made of bean paste. Before my mother came back, I would be playing in the garden with the snails and the pebbles, and when my mother came back I was very happy to see her and I took the cake that she gave me and I went off to eat it in the garden. I knew I mustn't eat it quickly. I wanted to eat it slowly - the slower, the better. I'd just chew a little bit off the edge to allow the sweetness of the biscuit to go into my mouth and I'd look up at the blue sky. I'd look down at the dog. I'd look at the cat. That is how I ate the cake and it took me half an hour to eat it. I had no worries... I wasn't worried about fame, honour, about profit... so that cake of my childhood is a souvenir. All of us have lived moments like that, when we are not craving for anything, not regretting anything. We are not asking ourselves philosophical questions like "*Who am I*?" Are we able to eat a cake like that now? Drink a cup of tea like that? Enjoy ourselves in our environment? We come to Plum Village to learn to do these things again, the things which we thought we could no longer do. We have come to learn how to walk again. To walk solidly, like a free person, without spirits chasing after us. We have come here to learn how to sit. To sit at ease as if we are sitting on a lotus flower, not sitting on hot coals. Sitting on hot coals, we just jump up and down the whole time – we lose all our peace. Here, we learn how to breathe, how to smile; we learn how to cook. Our mother taught us how to eat, how to drink, how to stand up, how to walk, how to speak... everything! Now we have to learn these things over again. We

have to be born again in the light of the true Dharma, the true teachings of the Buddha.

We are going to study the *Sutra on Shining the Light*. This is not a Sutra spoken by the Buddha, it is a Sutra spoken by Mahamoggallana. It is in the canon and in the canon we see there are sutras not only spoken by the Buddha, but also spoken by the disciples of the Buddha. We are very happy about this, because we see the continuation of the Buddha right in the life time of the Buddha. Often after his disciples had given teachings, the Buddha would praise them and say, "If I had spoken, I would have said exactly the same...", so we see how the Buddha supported and encouraged his students and we see how the continuation of the Buddha was there, even in the lifetime of the Buddha. The original name of this sutra; was *Anumana* , which means '*Measuring and Reflecting'*, it is very necessary for monks and nuns. In the Chinese canon, it is called the *Sutra on Inviting*. Besides Shariputra, *Mahamoggallana*, Ananda and Katyayana, there are nuns, such as Dharmadhina, who gave talks. These talks by nuns have also been recorded in the Sutras.

SUTRA ON MEASURING AND REFLECTING: <u>(Wednesday Evening)</u>

Thus have I heard. At one time the Venerable Mahamoggallana was staying with the Bhagga people in Sumsumaragira, in the Deer Park in the Bhesakala grove. The Venerable Mahamoggallana addressed the bhikkhus: "Dharma friends." "Yes friend", they replied to the Venerable Mahamoggallana. The Venerable Mahamoggallana spoke as follows:

"It is possible that a monk should make the following request: "Speak to me, Reverend Monks." If he is difficult to speak to, endowed with qualities which make him difficult to deal with, intolerant, not good at grasping what is taught, then those who practice the path of sublime conduct with him will think he is not one to be spoken to, he is not one to be instructed, he is not someone we can have confidence in. What are the qualities which make someone difficult to approach?

We should know that Mahamoggallana was one of those who had a part in building the Sangha. Shariputra and Mahamoggallana were given the role of building Sangha, so that the Sangha would have happiness. Of course, there were other monks beside Shariputra and Mahamoggallana who also practiced Sangha-building. However, we know that these were the two monks who played that role most of all. We know that when Shariputra passed away, Ananda could not stand up because the passing away of Shariputra left a huge gap in the Sangha. When we study the sutra, we see how, in the time of Buddha, there were monks in the Sangha who did not go along with the Sangha. There were people whose behaviour did not allow other monks to approach them and to help them, so these people lived like a drop of oil in a bowl of water. They could not make progress and they could not bring happiness to themselves or the Sangha and, aware of this, Mahamoggallana gave this teaching, so that everyone in the Sangha could practice. When we live in the Sangha and there is harmony, we can enjoy ourselves, we can talk to anybody in the Sangha and be happy, and we can also make others happy. But if we are not able to communicate with other members of the Sangha, if nobody wants to be close to us, then we are isolated and when we are isolated we cannot be happy and we cannot make the Sangha happy.

In the past, there was a practice of silence... that is, it is like 'putting into Coventry', to 'isolate'. We don't talk to that person at all, and in the temple they practiced that. They used the method of isolating that person, as that person causes suffering to happen in the Sangha. Everybody is silent with regard to that person; they don't talk to that person. But in the practice of Plum Village, we have never needed to use the practice of isolation as we have other methods. When we isolate someone, it is as if we have given up hope in that person. We feel we cannot teach that person any more. In the beginning, people try their best to help the person, but after a while they give up hope. They say that there is no benefit for that person to stay here and there is no benefit for us for that person to stay here and so they use the final practice they can use, and that is to isolate that person. So we know that practice is the final effort and it really shows that the Sangha has failed and the person who was isolated has failed as well. Isolation means we have failed, we are defeated, we have no capacity to intervene in order to help that person and to help the Sangha.

In the past they didn't talk about 'shining the guiding light', which is what we practice today. But, in fact, the practice of shining the guiding light did exist in the time of the Buddha. In the practice of the Parivarana ceremony, the monks would shine lights on each others practice, but in Plum Village we practice shining light in the practice throughout the year, not just once a year. Before someone receives the precepts, before someone becomes a dharmacharya, during retreats and at the end of retreats, we practice 'shining the guiding light'. If we've practiced this 'shining the guiding light' it means that we haven't given up and that we intervene with the strength of the Sangha in order to help. If one person shines light, it is not enough to help that person transform, but if the whole Sangha shines the light, it is. Imagine there is someone in the Sangha who is isolated and will not listen to anyone else and nobody likes to come to that person and help them. If we allow that situation to continue a long time, until we have no other way but to practice isolation - it is a great shame. It is a great shame for the Sangha and a great shame for the person who is isolated, so we need to have another method to use and that is 'shining guiding light'.

In the sutra, Mahamoggallana suggests methods – not just for one person, but for everyone in the Sangha to use. Because we do not want to become a part of the Sangha which no one dares to approach, because we haven't got the capacity to listen deeply, because we have very heavy habit energies which we follow without knowing that we're making others suffer. When we live in a Sangha, we take refuge in that Sangha and we make use of that Sangha to encourage us, to support us and teach us. If we isolate ourselves, if we don't know how to obey, if we are not easy to speak to, even though our brothers and sisters want to help us, they cannot and finally we have to leave our Sangha. It is a great shame for us, and a great shame for our Sangha. So, when we read the Sutra, we can learn from Mahamoggallana and we can apply what we learn in our daily life. At the same time, we are able to see the methods which, in the time of the Buddha, Mahamoggallana taught and which, today, we are still practicing in Plum Village and which we can contribute to future generations for their practice, without having to use the method called isolation. Mahamoggallana brings up the reasons which make it impossible for us to be able to talk to someone set apart in the Sangha. *If he has wrong desires and is controlled by his wrong desires*, that is the reason which makes it difficult for us to talk to him. In the most recent English version it says; *A bhikkhu has evil wishes and is dominated by evil wishes*... I have translated 'evil wishes' as 'wrong desires'. In Chinese, it means some sort of infatuation - some sort of attachment.

When a part of a Sangha is overwhelmed by an attachment and it stops the rest of the Sangha from being able to approach that person, we don't want anybody to mention to us that we are attached. We have some kind of attachment to another person in the Sangha or a person outside the Sangha and the Sangha knows about it. Some people may have come and have pointed it out to us, but we always try to avoid it, we don't want the help of the Sangha. This attachment is the first reason that Mahamoggallana gives as a reason which makes it impossible for the Sangha to be able to approach us and talk to us. This brother, this sister, is caught in their attachment and therefore the Sangha cannot approach them and help them. Are we in that situation? Do we have some wrong desire, some wrong attachment that is going to isolate us, just as it has isolated the other person in the Sangha? That is called 'looking in the mirror' - we see that others who have been attached have been isolated, and they cannot accept whenever anybody comes to encourage them to do differently. So the first thing which makes it difficult for the Sangha to approach us and talk to us is when we are caught in a wrong attachment. It means that our attachment is unwholesome. It is an attachment with another person in the Sangha, or somebody outside the Sangha.

The second reason is that he only knows how to praise himself and criticize others. *The bhikkhu who praises himself and despises others is difficult to approach.* There are people who only want their self-pride to be protected and they haven't the capacity to praise anybody else in the Sangha, except themselves. They can only talk about the weaknesses of other people. They have no capacity to praise others in the Sangha. That has happened - it happens in all of the hamlets. There are people who have never opened their mouth to praise one of their brothers or sisters. They only wait until their brothers and sisters have some weakness or short-coming and then they talk about it, and if somebody can't see our good points and praise our good points, then we cannot bear it. We don't have the capacity to praise anyone else, we don't have the capacity to 'water the flowers' of others, and we cannot speak well of others. Standing before that person we cannot talk about their positive things, and we cannot talk about their positive things to other people either, if we are like that then we will be isolated in our Sangha. This is someone who really wants to be praised. Everybody has positive and negative points, but some people only want to talk about the negative things of other people, they're very stingy, very mean. We know that the other person has short-comings and they have to transform those short-comings, but we have to be able to see the positive things in that person too. Sometimes we just see the unwholesome things and they blind us to the wholesome things in that person. The other person has made us suffer one time and when we look at that person, all we see is that one time they made us suffer. We are unable to see all the goodness and sweetness they have contributed to the Sangha. We are never able to open our mouth to praise people.

Now, when we see somebody like that in the Sangha, we come back to ourselves and we ask ourselves – "Am I like that? Am I someone who just sees the faults of others and am I not able to see or talk about the good points in other people?" And when someone just wants to be praised and wants to despise others, we see that person and we ask ourselves*, "*Am I like that? Do I want to be isolated because I'm like that?" If we have some prejudice about one of our brothers or sisters, we have to practice and ask ourselves the question: "*Besides the weaknesses I see in that person, have*

they any strengths?" And we have to number those strengths. When I talk to another person about that person, can I talk about the good points of that person to others, and if I can't then I'm isolating myself. Or, in the case of a person who is easily angered... *A bhikkhu who is angry and who is mastered by his anger is difficult to approach.* Maybe we don't have a very cruel nature, but we may get angry very easily. People get tired of that and they don't want to get near us, they don't dare talk to us. They don't want to have a conversation with us because we get angry so easily. We are easily mastered by our anger and that means we cannot be master of ourselves when we are in that state. When somebody gets angry easily and cannot be master of themselves, they are easily isolated and other parts of the Sangha don't dare come near that person, to converse with them, to help them. But we have to ask ourselves – if somebody else in the Sangha is like that, am I like that too? Do I easily get angry? Am I easily mastered by my anger?

The fourth reason is the bhikkhu who is angry and because of his anger he bears a grudge and is difficult to approach. There's some people who, once they have gotten angry, forget everything... they are not angry anymore. But there are the people who get angry and then they bear a grudge afterwards and the light of their eyes and their words and their way of behavior makes us want to go and sit somewhere else. Because he holds a grudge, we avoid that person as if he were a leper. He doesn't manifest his anger in an expressive way, but holds that grudge and that grudge influences his way of speech, his way of thinking and his actions. When we bear a grudge like that the Sangha will not want to talk to us. A bhikkhu is angry and because of his anger he talks unkindly and people don't dare come near him because of this and so he's isolated. He gets angry and it shows on his face and in his speech that he is angry and when we speak in an angry way, people don't dare come near us.

A bhikkhu who, when corrected, corrects in turn the one who has corrected him, is difficult to approach. Instead of saying *"Thank you for having pointed out my fault to me*", he corrects that person in return. When you say "Y*ou think you are better than me, do you?",* or *"I know I didn't close the door in mindfulness, but your lack of mindfulness is even greater than mine*"... if we say something like that then that person won't correct us any more. If two or three people correct us and we act like that then nobody will want to correct us any more and we will be isolated. We have to look and see if we're like that because we must not become an element of the Sangha like that. A bhikkhu, who, when corrected, disparages the one who corrected him is difficult to approach. Disparages means, "*Your practice is so bad already and you don't look after your own practice... all you think about is other peoples faults...*"

The ninth thing is – a bhikkhu who, when corrected, retorts, is difficult to approach. We see that the person is trying to help us, but we also want to blame them in return... so the advice of the others is not received by us and no-one will dare to approach us. Sometimes the other person doesn't really show us the mistake we have made. They are talking about something else, but because we have an internal formation, thinking that people are going to criticize us, when they say something we think they are criticizing us even when they're not. So we disparage that other person, we retort to that other person, even though that person isn't even trying to correct us. We think that people are taking a devious route in order to criticize us, when in fact they are not even talking about us at all.

The tenth thing is a bhikkhu who, when corrected, evades the question by asking another or changes the subject. He evades the question by asking other questions. There are people like that. So, a bhikkhu, who, when corrected, evades the question by asking another changes the subject. He acts in a 'gross' way... somebody whose actions are 'gross' has evil intention and nobody wants to come near him. Someone who is jealous and sulky may make people afraid of them and if we have these characteristics they will avoid us. A person who is jealous does not know how to share the merit and cannot practice no-self. When they see the other person is happy... the other person is loved and valued, they cannot bear it. They ask "*Why am I not valued? Why am I not loved? The other person is loved, is valued... has that person done something such as saying unkind things about me behind my back which has made them valued and made me not valued*?" But if we see there are people around us who are loved and valued, it should make us happy because that person is my brother, my sister, and when they are happy I can share their happiness. Being able to do that makes me light and fresh and we know that when another is light and fresh, we are also. When we are light and fresh, we are loved and we are valued, but if we are jealous then we lose all our fresh-ness and all our light-ness and therefore we are not able to enjoy or profit from the good qualities of others. Therefore, jealousy can destroy our happiness and the happiness of the Sangha and make it impossible for others to be able to approach us. That kind of person is unmindful...

Sutra on Measuring & Reflecting:Contd

© Thich Nhat Hanh

Dear Friends,

Today is the 2nd of April 1998 and we are in the New Hamlet. We are studying the Sutra on Shining Light, which is found in the chanting book on Wednesday evening. *Friends, one should infer one's own state by considering the state of others in the following way. A person who has wrong desires and is controlled by wrong desires, I do not find it easy to like. If I had wrong desires and were controlled by these wrong desires, others would not find me easy to like. My friends, a monk who knows this decides, "May I not have wrong desires and not be controlled by these wrong desires". That is also true in other cases such as exalting myself and despising others, being angry, and being mastered by my anger.* This is the method which Master Mahamoggallana suggests to his friends in the practice.

We see in our Sangha somebody who is attached, who is caught in sensual desire. The Sangha sees clearly that that person is attached and is not free. Whenever people come and try and talk about that person's weak points, that person is angry. Nobody wants to shine light on that person. When we see someone like that, that person is difficult for us to deal with. We should shine light on that person. If we want to be easy to deal with, if we want the Sangha to approach us, teach us, shine light on us, we have to give up being caught up in wrong desire, in attachment. This is what Mahamoggallana talks about as one of nineteen cases which make it difficult to approach someone.

One thing not mentioned in the sutra, is the seeds of these weaknesses. We all have these weaknesses in us.

Another person may have a weakness that manifests very obviously in them. In us that seed may be quite weak, but it's still there. If we don't practice mindfulness, if we allow that seed to be watered, it will grow and we will be caught in difficulties like the other person we look at in our Sangha. We may say that that person is caught, is embracing wrong desires, is attached, and we think that we are not attached. Maybe people look at us and they see that we are not attached, see that we are not caught in wrong desires, but it doesn't mean to say the seed of attachment isn't in us. We are just lucky. The seed of wrong desire and attachment in us hasn't been watered and it hasn't manifested, but if we are not mindful that seed can be watered and we will become isolated in our Sangha like this person.

This is the second part that is not mentioned in the sutra. We should practice a little further and say, "No, I don't have wrong desire at the moment. I am not embracing wrong desire at the moment. I am not attached, but the seed of attachment and wrong desire is still in me, in the depths of consciousness, so I should practice with all my might so that that seed is not watered. I am fortunate; I am luckier than the other person, that that seed is still small. And I give an aspiration to feel compassion for the other person who is caught in wrong desire. I am ready to do anything I can to help that person." We compare ourselves with another person, saying "That person has been isolated because that person is caught in wrong desire, and I don't want to be caught in wrong desire because I don't want to be isolated." Then we have to go to the second layer of practice. That person has a sense of attachment and wrong desire. I also have the seed of attachment, and although fortunately in me that seed is very small, I don't feel that I am completely secure. I don't despise the other person. I try to find a way to help that person. I don't continue in the attitude of avoiding that person but I try to help that person to open up, to develop, so they are free from their attachment. This is the second layer of practice which is not mentioned in the sutra.

We can go through all these nineteen factors in this way. Maybe we see somebody else in the Sangha who only knows how to praise themselves and is always prepared to criticize others. Am I like that? We are looking at ourselves—somebody who is severe, and is not capable of opening their lips in order to praise someone else. If we're like that, we should recognize we're like that. Do I just want to be praised, and have I not got the capacity to receive constructive criticism from my friends? Am I someone, who for all these years, has not

been able to open myself to praise somebody? If we see that we are like that we should be ashamed and we should straight away practice in order to get out of that habit. Maybe nobody has told us this yet because we haven't the capacity to receive constructive criticism.

So this is the practice of shining light. We look at somebody in the Sangha and ask ourselves if we are like that person. Maybe we are a twin of that person. We are exactly like that person. When we look at that person we see ourselves, and when we see ourselves we have to practice straight away to change the situation. We have a weakness and we know we have that weakness. Whenever we see that we have a weakness, we accept that we have that weakness. That is awakening; that is enlightenment. Our success in the practice is due to these moments of enlightenment. "I have that weakness and I accept that I have that weakness."

For example, we ask ourselves, "Am I someone who just likes to be praised? Am I someone who is totally afraid of hearing the truth about myself?" We ask ourselves that question because in the Sangha there are people like that, and am *I* one of those people? In the Sangha there is someone who is not able to open their lips to praise someone in front of another. Am I like that? That is a question; that is an observation that we have to make, to recognize the seeds in us. We have the seeds, but is it a great important seed or is it a small seed? That depends on the conditions and causes which have made it small or great. If that seed is an important seed in us, we should recognize that we have it, and that it is already well-developed in us, and that we have to practice with that seed.

Other people, although they like to be praised, have the capacity to receive constructive criticism from others. They don't praise others a lot, but from time to time they have the capacity to talk about the positive elements in their friends. They also know that when they see unwholesome things in others, they have that unwholesome thing in themselves. If we don't practice, the unwholesome seed—of praising ourselves, of criticizing others, of being unable to receive constructive criticism—will grow in us, and we will have it in the future. This is how to practice looking in the mirror.

Next we look deeply into getting angry and being mastered by anger. In the Sangha there are people who easily get angry and easily get carried away by their anger. We all see that person and everybody feels sorry for that person. Everybody avoids that person, because when they get angry we receive the anger from them. So we look into the mirror of that person to see, "Do I have that quality; am I someone who easily gets angry? Am I easily carried away by my anger?" If so then we have to really practice to get out of that situation.

Now we come to the fourth situation of someone who bears a grudge; their anger lasts for a long time. Maybe their ears and their face don't go red when they're angry; they don't say heavy things, but they are not able to let go of their anger, and the anger goes on from day to day, from month to month. Other people get angry and are mastered by anger, but after twenty-four hours they have forgotten their anger. There are people like that in our Sangha, and they come and say they are sorry to the other. Such a person is easier to bear than the one whose anger carries on from month to month, from year to year, a person who pollutes our mind with their anger, darkens our mind with their anger. We should ask ourselves, "Am I someone whose anger continues for a long time?" We should look at ourselves in the mirror of the person who gets angry for a long time. Do we bear our grudges for a long time, or have we the capacity to let go?

[Bell]

In the book of the Flowers in the Garden of Meditation, there are histories of different masters. One master says if a monk gets angry he should not keep his anger over more than one night. In Vietnam children say "angry, sad, or annoyed for five minutes." We have the right to be angry or sad, but five minutes is enough. The master of the Flowers in the Garden of Meditation gives us the right to be angry all night, but the next morning our anger should have finished. In the Upper Hamlet, the New Hamlet, you know how to say this in Chinese, you can write it up if you like for people to see. Sometimes we bear a grudge, keep our resentment, and that resentment manifests in our actions and our words, because we don't know how to transform it. It may manifest in a very subtle way, in the way we speak. There are people who speak in a very grumpy way, their words are unkind and bitter, but don't know that they're doing it. Only if they heard a recording of themselves, would they think that they were speaking in a grumpy way. We may think that we're speaking just like everybody else, but in fact we're speaking in a reprimanding, angry way. The element of anger is in our speech without us knowing it. In the *Sutra on Looking in the Mirror* we practice with that. We can read it every week so we can look into the mirror at ourselves. If we are just thinking when we chant, "Does it sound good or not?" we don't get to the meaning of the sutra. We don't look into the mirror of ourselves. Actually when we read the sutra, we should be looking into the mirror of ourselves. If we can't do that while we're chanting, we should read the sutra on our own. These are a few examples of looking into the mirror. Now we go on.

My friends, this is how bhikkhus should reflect on themselves. Do I have wrong desires, and am I in the control of wrong desires? What the sutra means by "inference", is looking carefully, looking deeply. It is the original title of this sutra. It also means the resources, the provisions we take with us on the journey. In one of the meditation schools in China they use this word *provisions*. It means you are thinking about the thing you cannot think about. How can you think about what is unthinkable? To conceive the inconceivable; how can you conceive something that is inconceivable? *If while inferring from the other, looking at the other, the bhikkhu thinks, "I do have wrong desires and I am controlled by wrong desires", he should try to abandon...* We have the seeds of all the nineteen, but maybe we are caught in four or five of them. If we see we are caught in one of these nineteen situations, we have to reflect in order to be enlightened. We are caught in one, two, three, or four of these, but if we are caught only in one of them then that's better than being caught in many.

But if he sees; "I am not controlled by wrong desire," then he feels joyful and he knows that he has to practice day and night, training in what is beneficial. This means that Moggallana has seen the second layer of the practice. We see we are not caught in that at the moment but we know we have to practice more so that in the future we will continue not be caught in these things. We have to transform the seed even though it is very small in us.

I do not have wrong desires and I am not controlled by wrong desires. Then he can joyfully let go and he trains in what is beneficial. He knows he has to practice diligently to increase in the beneficial so the seed doesn't have an opportunity to manifest. We have to practice diligently just like that. We are making a ditch and we are making a wall, but we are still not sure if the ditch is deep enough and the wall is high enough to keep people out; therefore we have to keep digging more and more and building higher and higher. This is also true of other cases like praising oneself and despising others, being angry, or being controlled by anger.

My friends, if while reflecting a bhikkhu sees that he has not yet given up these unbeneficial qualities, he makes an effort to give them up. If we see we have one of these nineteen, we have to get down to the practice. *If when reflecting he sees he has given up all these unbeneficial qualities, then he is joyful but knows he has to practice diligently day and night in these beneficial qualities.* If we see we are caught in these things we have to practice, but if we see we are not caught we also have to practice. We are not isolated; we are not suffering because of attachment. We don't have the fault of praising no-one but ourselves, we don't get angry, we don't speak in anger. We know we don't do these things now but we know that in the future we may be caught in these things, so we practice to be sure.

So this section is talking about the Four Right Efforts. If things that are unwholesome have not arisen, don't allow them to arise. If unwholesome things have already arisen, act in such a way that you can transform them. If wholesome things have not yet arisen, work so that they can arise; and if wholesome things have already arisen, help them to stay with you. This is what is meant by diligence, the Four Right Efforts. Although he doesn't use those words here, what Mogallana is talking about is the Four Right Efforts. He gives the image of someone looking in a mirror and that's why we give the sutra the name, The Sutra on Looking in the Mirror. *It's like when a young man or woman who is fond of adorning himself contemplates his face in a clear mirror or a bowl of limpid water. If he sees dirt or a blemish there he tries to clean that dirt or blemish. If he sees no dirt or blemish, he thinks to himself, it is good, my face is clean. So my friends, if a bhikkhu reflects and sees that all these unwholesome qualities have not yet been given up then he makes an effort to give them all up. If he sees that he has given them all up he lets go with joy and day and night trains to nourish the beneficial qualities. The Venerable Maha Mogallana had spoken. The venerable bhikkhus were delighted with his words.*

According to this sutra our daily practice is a practice of looking in the mirror. We all like to be beautiful, so we have to look in the mirror. But this is not a mirror we buy in the supermarket, this mirror is the mirror of mindfulness.

The Chant On Joyfully Sharing The Merit:

Now we are going to read The Chant On Joyfully Sharing The Merit.

The word *tui* here means following in accordance with, participating in, identifying with joy. When we see something beautiful, good, or happy in another, we see that person has understanding, love, happiness, and our heart follows that, supports that, and is in agreement with that. Our friend for example is able to smile and that smile brightens up their face. We feel happy because our friend is able to smile. Our friend is praised by our teacher; our friend is praised by other brothers and sisters; our friend practices diligently and transforms. We feel happy. We support that practice in our friend and our joy follows that person's joy. Whatever positive thing happens around us, we are happy about it and if we are able to be joyful because of other people's happiness, then our happiness will increase a hundred times. It's a very easy method of practice. I say it's very easy, maybe I'm not right. It's a practice which can bring us a lot of happiness—that's what I want to say. We don't have to do a lot because these little happinesses happen around us every day. If we know how to follow along, how to rejoice in these little merits of other people, we will have a lot of happiness. If we don't know how to do that, we will be a jealous person. Jealousy is a hell. Attachment is hell and jealousy is a second hell. So why do we choose these two things? Why don't we choose the paradise of rejoicing in the merit of others? So among our brothers and sisters if somebody is able to realize something in the practice, then *we* should rejoice. Then their happiness becomes our happiness too. The person whose merit we rejoice in may not even be as happy as we are; we may be happier than they are. But if we cannot make small realizations how can we make great realizations?

Say that one of our friends has been in the hell of sorrow for these past months and today she is able to smile. That is paradise, the opening of the door of paradise. Why don't we celebrate that? Why don't we celebrate our friend's transformation? Then we will be able to protect our friend. Now you have been able to get out of these days of darkness, and I am so happy for you. And our brother is learning Chinese and is praised by the teacher. Even though my Chinese is not praised by the teacher, when I hear that my friend's Chinese is praised I feel very happy. My brother's success becomes my happiness, and that gives me energy, the energy of sharing the merit. All these happinesses, all these successes, of myself and of those around me, I bring and I transfer. I direct to a very beautiful goal called transferring the merits. Each step, each smile, every Chinese character I am able to learn, every affliction I am able to transform, all these things are merit. We should not offer up the merit of these things to something which is not worthy of it being offered to. We should find the most wonderful thing to offer up the merit to, and not offer it to small goals. We have to find the goal of our merit. There is a lot of merit, and the merit that we produce every day, that our brothers and sisters produce every day... what are we to offer it up to, transfer it to? It must be something worthy. This is the teaching of this chant.

Say we do sitting meditation very diligently; we chant the sutra very diligently and we want everybody to *know* that we're doing this. We want to be praised for doing this. This is the wrong kind of transferring the merit. If we practice only because we want to be praised, what a waste, because to practice diligently is to give great joy, a wonderful joy for us. Actually meditation and chanting are already a great joy and we don't need to be praised for it, because that practice itself gives us joy. If we do these practices just to be praised, then we direct merit to being praised only. When we do this, we haven't anything left to offer up to the highest aim of our life. If we say something very deep and beautiful and no one else knows about it, we can offer that up. If we feel arrogant about this, saying "Aren't I worthy of being praised," then all the merit of the high thing we said is just directed towards our pride. That joy which results is very small. It's not worthy of offering the merit to.

For example, we give a good Dharma talk. We feel very well that we've given that Dharma talk because we've encouraged so many people to transform. We are happy for the Dharma. We are happy for the Buddha. We are happy for the transformation of people. If we expect when we give a good Dharma talk that people will say, "Oh teacher, you gave a wonderful talk, I've never heard such a wonderful talk as that." The joy that comes is a very small joy; it just belongs to the field of the superiority complex, like when merit is offered up only for our fame or our profit. Offering merit up to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the transformation of many people is immeasurable merit. When merit is offered up to the highest goal, then it is immeasurable merit. When we are wiping the bowls, when we are cleaning the floor, then we do that with joy because we love the Sangha. We want the Sangha to have an opportunity to rest. That is why we are giving extra time to do the cleaning up ourselves, so that when people come they will see a clean kitchen. When we clean the kitchen like that we have a lot of happiness. If we work just because we are being forced to work, it's not the same. But now we are working because we want to work, not because somebody's forcing us to, so we feel very well. If we are just doing it because we want to be praised, and people come and say, "Oh, aren't you wonderful? Everybody's gone to bed and you're doing it all on your own," if we just do it for that then there's no merit.

A man hears that the temple is about to build a new Dharma Hall. He puts on a beautiful robe, goes in his car to the temple, and offers a hundred thousand gold pieces to build the new Dharma Hall. The man says to the abbot, "Here are a hundred thousand gold pieces I offer for the Dharma Hall." And the abbot just bows and receives it and continues to talk to the other monks. Then he sees that he is not being highly respected for his great gift. He's waiting for special treatment; he wants to be welcomed in special ways, and when he sees he's just being treated like anybody else, he's not happy. He sits but he won't listen to what the teacher is talking about to the other monks. He just sits there and says, "Look, there's the money I gave you," and an hour later he says, "Look, look. There's a hundred thousand gold pieces I have given you." Then he says, "A hundred thousand gold pieces is an awful lot. A *hundred* gold pieces is a lot." At last the abbot says, "Oh, do you want me to thank you? Really you should be the person thanking me, because if you give money you have a lot of merit. That merit will be greatly diminished if you just give money to be thanked."

When Bodhidharma came from India to China, the emperor talked just like that. He said, "Master I have constructed so many temples; I have cast so many statues in bronze; I have cast so many bells. Do I have a lot of merit?" And Bodhidharma said, "No merit at all, because the only reason you did these things was to offer up the merit to your own pride." We have to offer up the merit to the highest, the most beautiful things, not the small things like the words of praise. [Bell] This chant on sharing the merit has four parts. The first part is repentance, the second is offering up the merit, the third is making a deep aspiration and the fourth is the conclusion. Now we're going to read the first part, on repentance. *All you All you blessed Ones who dwell in the world, show your compassion to us.* We could think that the Buddha has gone, has passed away, but when we read this we should see the presence of all Buddhas with us right here. *World-Honored One, please show your compassion to us*. I'm someone who needs your compassion. We have to see that. We have to see we have weaknesses; we have made mistakes; we have suffering. We really need the energy of compassion. "I need the compassion of my brothers. I need the compassion of my sisters. I need the compassion of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas." *Because in this very life and in many past lives from beginningless time we have made mistakes which have caused suffering to ourselves and to others.* We accept the truth that we have brought about suffering. First of all we have made ourselves suffer, and after that we have made others suffer, and all these sufferings, all these mistakes, come from our ignorance.

In this very life and in many past lives from beginningless time we have made mistakes. Our wrong perceptions have caused suffering to ourselves and to others. We have done wrong ourselves or bidden others to do wrong, or we have given our consent to wrongdoing. These mistakes may have been made by ourselves, or we may have asked someone else—a friend, a brother, a sister, a child—to do these things. We have pushed them. And if we push someone to do something wrong by words or by ideas or by our physical actions, then we bear the result as much as if we had done the thing ourselves. We have influenced that other person, so we have participated in the wrongdoing of the other person even though we haven't done it ourselves. Even if we haven't pushed someone else to do it, when we've seen someone else do it, if we haven't reacted against it or done anything about it, then we are also a participator. On a train there is someone who is beating someone else and we just allow that person to go on doing it. We just sit there and do nothing about it. This is the wrongdoing of *not* intervening. Not intervening is also wrongdoing. If we see someone being killed and we don't do anything, we are also doing something wrong. We are giving our consent in a way. We can't say that it's not our business, because we are not a stone; we are not an animal; we are a human being with a mind. We cannot allow things to happen like this, and so this is called the wrongdoing of not intervening or of giving our consent.

These are all our responsibility; we are always responsible in these cases for killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, deception, and other harmful misactions. The five infractions of the Five Mindfulness Trainings are among the ten deeds which are called unwholesome. As far as our body is concerned, there are three unwholesome actions. As far as our speech is concerned, there are four unwholesome actions. And as far as our mind is concerned there are three unwholesome actions. These are called the ten unwholesome actions. The three unwholesome actions of the body are killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct. The four which belong to speech are lying, exaggerating, speaking cruel language, and speaking with two tongues. The three to do with the mind are greed, anger and ignorance, also called

craving, hatred and ignorance. If we do these ten things they are called the ten wrong actions, or the ten unwholesome actions. And if we don't do these things then it is called acting in ten wholesome ways. There is a sutra called *The Way of the Ten Wholesome Actions Sutra*. The Five Mindfulness Trainings contain the ten wholesome actions. When we analyze the Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings we see that they also are the practice of the ten wholesome actions. And actually the Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings come from the ten wholesome actions.

Whether we hide unwholesome actions or they are known to others, they have brought us to the hell realms. Sometimes we do something wrong and we hide it from others, and sometimes we do wrong things and we don't hide it from others. Either of these kind of wrong actions will take us along the dark paths of the lower realms. We are led by these wrong actions along dark paths to dark destinations, to the hell realms, the hungry ghost realms, and the animal realms. *These greatest dark paths cause us to be born in uncivilized places*, faraway frontier places where there is no civilization, no freedom, no law. The light of freedom, democracy, and morality has not entered these far away places. The call of human rights is not heard there. When we are born in these places we do not have the opportunity to be human in its fullest sense: we cannot go to school; we cannot be in touch with morality; we cannot be in touch with the practice and be directed in the practice. These are called the uncivilized places.

We may live a life with no civilization, or we may have impaired sense organs. Maybe we are blind; we are deaf; we are dumb so we cannot chant the sutras, or we are insane so we cannot really hear what is being taught. One of our five senses is impaired because we have done things in the past which were unwholesome, so we don't have the opportunity to realize our full human potential. We see there are young people who are born in dark areas with no democracy, no love, no education, no social justice. They can't go to school, can't be educated in how to love, and they become bandits. That is the karma of those young people. It is also the collective karma, our karma and their karma, that has brought about living conditions of great difficulty like that. We sit here in conditions which are very favorable to the practice. We are able to be in touch with Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, with democracy, with civilization. But there are children—hundreds, thousands, *millions* of children who have been born in situations of no freedom, no democracy, no opportunity to learn how to read and write. Father is drunk; Mother is not educated and does not know how to bring up children; everyone in the village is evil. Therefore the person cannot grow to realize their full human potential. These are the kind of unfortunate conditions we can be born in. That is not just the karma of the young children but it is also our karma, also our doing. We practice today so that we will be able to help children like this. We can be compassionate. Now there are millions of children like this—we have to practice in such a way that we can intervene and save these children from the hell in which they are living.

These obstacles of wrongdoing I am determined with one-pointed concentration to repent today. Nobody can claim to be pure. No one has the right to say, "I have not done these wrong things." We have all contributed to the making of hells. We cannot say we are not responsible. If there are children living in hells like this, I know that I have lived in an irresponsible way and I have not contributed to dismantling hells that are existing, whether in Africa or in Asia or in the great cities in the west such as Los Angeles and New York. These hells are present in Manila, in Saigon, in Bangkok. There are hells all over. We can call them "frontier regions," where people grow up but they can't realize their full potential as human beings. So now I join my palms and say, "I know I am responsible for some of this and I repent of it, I vow to live responsibly so that in the future I can help these children. I need your compassion, the compassion of my teachers, of my brothers, of my sisters, of the Buddha. I have woken up and I have seen that my responsibility is great."

The second part of the chant on sharing merit, after repentance, is the offering up of merit. In the past we have done wrong things which have brought about suffering, but in the past we have also done things to bring about merit. That is what is wonderful about this chant. *Blessed Ones, be our witness. Think compassionately of us.* We are surrendering ourselves before all the Buddhas. We are being embraced by the energy of love, compassion and understanding. We are in the embrace of the Buddhas and the bodhisattvas, who open their arms with compassion and understanding and embrace us as the practitioner who is surrendering before them. We surrender ourselves before you and make this aspiration: *If in numberless past lives or in this very life we have practiced giving, even if only a handful of food or a simple coat; if we have ever spoken kindly, even if only a few words; if we have ever looked with the eyes of compassion, even if only for a moment...* Now we return to the past, return to the future, to see that in the past and the future we have not only done things which are wrong but we have also done positive things. Yesterday for example we saved an ant that was about to be trod on. That is the action of a bodhisattva. Yesterday we knew how to look on our sister or brother with the eyes of compassion. The day before yesterday we gave away some of our clothes to someone who was cold. That is the action of a bodhisattva.

Now we return to be in touch with actions of bodhisattvas which we ourselves have done. That is what is good about this chant. *If in numberless past lives or in this very life we have practiced giving...* We must have practiced giving, even though it is not very great giving like the great bodhisattvas' giving. Have we ever given somebody who was hungry something to eat, even if only a handful of food? Yes, we must have done, in the present life and in the past life. We have brought a grain of rice for a bird. From time to time we give fish and birds rice or bread just for fun, we just want to enjoy seeing them come up to us. That isn't really generosity, that's just called having fun. It's generosity when we see that the bird is hungry in the winter and we make a little house for it to live in and we give it food to eat. That is generosity. Instead of buying fish to steam or fry and eat, we buy fish and turtles to release in the river. In the past monks used to do that. They went to the market, bought turtles and fish, got in the boat, rowed them out to the middle of the lake, set them free, and then chanted the refuges for them. My disciples did that to increase the lifespan of their teachers. They did this for snails. If you buy live snails, then the snail won't have to be boiled and then put on a skewer. He can go back to his life. People do that because they love their teacher. They hope that will bring long life to their teacher.

I think that Western people should learn this practice. On the birthday of your mother or your father or someone you love, instead of killing a chicken, save a life. Buy birds or fish and let them go. But be careful, because sometimes you let the fish and the birds go and they die, because they are only able to live in certain environments. If we free them in environments they can't live in... We have to use our intelligence. We should only buy birds and fish that we know will be able to live when we release them . That will bring joy to those we love and also to the fish and birds. So I want the Western people to learn this. Whenever you have a birthday or anniversary to celebrate, instead of eating meat and drinking wine, drink apple juice, buy fish and let them go, and offer up the merit for life. So that the heart of compassion in you can increase.

My Christian friends should practice like that. At Christmas we should not kill the turkey. Instead we should eat vegetarian and release the turkey. How many turkeys are killed at Christmas? When the turkey thinks about Christmas the turkey is very afraid. I think that Jesus Christ did not want us to kill so many turkeys every year. I heard it said the American government sent five hundred thousand turkeys to the American soldiers fighting in Vietnam at Christmas. I think we should find a better way to celebrate the birth of Christ. I'm sure it will make Jesus Christ very joyful if we can find a better way to celebrate. Instead of killing birds we can give them back their freedom. I'm sure when I say this that Jesus Christ is content with these words. Our celebrations, our birthdays, the birth of our mother, our father, our brother... We should practice generosity on these days. We should practice offering joy. How can we offer joy to life? Western people are very intelligent. If they want to, they can organize things very well to bring about joy on these days. I am confident that if Western people are in touch with the compassion of the Buddha, they will practice very well. If I have spoken kindly, even if only a few words today, this is a bit. If you're mean you can't open your mouth to say something kind, but if we're not mean, our mind becomes very light because of the words we speak. We can become a bodhisattva. In the past I have done that and in the present I can do that too. So why don't I continue? It's a wonderful method of practice; it doesn't make us feel guilty but it gives us confidence that we *have* done that, (sharing the merit) and we still have the capacity to do it. *If I have ever looked with the eyes of compassion, even if only for a moment...*

Eyes which are condemning or damning are frightening eyes. We may have used these kind of eyes. But now we have mindfulness; we have Thay in our eyes; we have our ancestral teachers in our eyes, so we can look with love on life. *With eyes of love we look on life.* It's a wonderful phrase. So why don't we every day use our eyes of love, looking at our brothers and our sisters, smiling, practicing this? We don't have to go anywhere to practice this. We can practice it right here. If I had known how to look with eyes of love. If I have been able to comfort somebody or console them, even if only a couple of times... Yes, we *have* been able to comfort and console in the past. Sometimes we are imprisoned in our own suffering and we do not have the opportunity, we do not have the energy to do that. That is a great pity. But when we are able to comfort and console, we help the other person and we bring happiness to ourselves. If I've ever listened carefully to the wonderful teachings, even if it was only one Dharma talk. In the past I have heard Dharma talks and now I am listening to the

Dharma, this is an opportunity to open my heart, to allow the rain of the Dharma to water the wholesome seeds in me. We have gone to listen to the teachings. This is immeasurable merit.

If I have ever offered a meal to monks and nuns, even if only once... **[Bell] Giving a meal to those who practice, what does that give? If you give a good person something to eat, the merit is much more than giving ten evil people something to eat. It doesn't mean we shouldn't give something to eat to people who are not good, but this is a matter of investing. By giving enough to eat to somebody who is good, to somebody who has done many beneficial things for living beings, then we are not only showing love to them but to all the people they help. The idea in the East is that monks and nuns are people who are practicing for us. We are caught in worldly matters and cannot practice properly, so we give food to the monks and nuns so they can practice for us. That is the idea in the East. The matter of giving food, robes, and shelter to monks and nuns has gone very deep into Asian culture. It's a practice to bring the good, the beautiful, and the true into this world. If monks and nuns are not practicing properly, then it's a wrong investment. A monk or a nun has to practice; otherwise they're not a monk or a nun.** ***If we've ever offered a meal to monks or nuns; if we've ever saved lives, even if only that of ants or worms; if we have recited sutras, even if only one or two lines...*** **All these things are actions which brought together will make us an Awakened One in the future. These little things we don't think are important may in fact be the causes and conditions that we can become awakened by. You are present here with the Sangha, don't think that this is something of no import. Don't think that being here to hear me teach is something of no import, this is something which comes about because of seeds we have sown in the past. Those seeds we have sown in the past have brought us here to this Dharma talk.**

As students of the Buddha, we know that everything is caused and conditioned. Buddhists in Vietnam believe a lot in causes and conditions, if a monk is going by taxi the taxi driver will only take half fare. He thinks that by doing this now, in the future he will have the opportunity, the causes and conditions, for listening to the Dharma. When I went to Taipei I went to a shop and wanted to buy four or five books. The monk who was with me was taking out the money to pay but the bookseller wanted to give me the books free. I didn't want to take them but the other monk said, "Look, this bookseller wants to have the opportunity to be your student in the future. That's why he's giving you the books now, so you should accept them out of compassion for him."

Later I was leading a retreat for six hundred monks and nuns in the Potala Temple. We went to meet the nuns on the mountain and when they saw me coming they were so happy because they had been to the retreat with me before and they liked me very much. They made me a bowl of noodles for my breakfast and put three spoonfuls of oil in it instead of one so that I could eat it. They knelt down before me, and everyone of them offered me a little envelope with one or two piasters in it— worth nothing, maybe 10 or 20 centimes in French money. One nun after the other came and knelt before me. They wanted nothing more than for me to lay my hand on their head, because they thought then in the future they would be born as my disciples. That is what is meant by sowing the causes and conditions. So with all my mindfulness I placed my hand on the head of each nun and I breathed in, and I calmed myself and I breathed out, and I smiled. There were many, many nuns, and when it was time for me to leave to give a Dharma talk there were still nuns left I hadn't laid my hand on. So I said, "if you want to plant the causes and conditions please do walking meditation with me."

So that's the Eastern way of looking at things. Even the smallest thing which we dedicate in the direction of the good and the beautiful— that is a cause and condition of things in the future. If someone whose mind is spaced or agitated goes into the stupa or the temple and says *Namo Buddhaya*, then in the future they will have the opportunity to meet the Dharma and transform, to become a Buddha or a bodhisattva. You just have to say it one time. So if your mind is agitated, dispersed, you go into the stupa, and say *Namo Buddhaya*, then you've already laid down the conditions for being a future bodhisattva or Buddha. Even the smallest action has the capacity to sow the seeds which will make us a Buddha or a bodhisattva in the future. It's a wonderful confidence we have in Buddhism. If we have ever supported others on the path; if we've ever been a monk or a nun, even if only for one life or one day; if we have observed the precepts, even if not perfectly; if we have knelt down and received the Five Mindfulness Trainings, that is already enough. All these things are wholesome roots which we have put down. Wholesome roots are *kusalamula.* We all have these wholesome roots and such actions as these make the wholesome roots increase in our heart. *Gathering wholesome roots together, respectfully we offer them to the Buddhas like a fragrant wreath of flowers.* We all have this fragrant wreath of flowers because there have been small actions we have done in the past. Small thoughts and words have planted seeds in the past and now there are causes and conditions which we may gather together and make into a wreath of flowers to offer to the Buddhas. Don't say we have nothing to offer to the Buddha, we can offer sweet rice or bananas, but the most precious offering we can give is the wholesome roots we have made in the past. *All this merit, the wholesome roots which we have put down, today we gather all this merit together and respectfully offer it to the Buddhas like a fragrant wreath of flowers. We offer it all to contribute to the fruit of highest awakening.* We do not offer this merit up to our fame, our position in society, but up to the fruit of awakening which is called *anuttara samyak bodhi* 'the highest awakening'.

Now we read the third part of the chant, for making aspirations. We want to make our aspiration greater, our intention, our volition, greater. Opening our heart wide we turn to the perfect highest awakening. The thing I want most of all is the highest awakening. To be head of practice, to be abbot, to be a dharma teacher*;* these are things not worthy of my highest aspiration. The thing I want most of all is the *bodhicitta,* the highest awakening. Only the bodhicitta is worthy of my highest aspiration. We are resolved to attain understanding, to realize deep love and compassion. I don't want everyday things, everyday fame, everyday profit. I want something very great. We are resolved to transform our own suffering, to practice diligently, to transform the suffering of all species. All the merits of body, speech, and mind, I want to direct to be part of the happiness of all people and all species. Apart from the bodhicitta, apart from the thirst for great understanding, apart from the vow to love deeply, I have no more desires. This is my greatest commitment. I don't want to build temples; I don't want to be an abbot; I don't want to have a high position in society. What I want is the highest awakening. My intention, my highest desire, is to be able to understand and to love and to relieve the suffering of those around me. All the other things, they are not the goal of my aspiration. This is the food of intention of a practitioner, the third kind of food.

There are people who want to live in order to get revenge. But we want to live in order to relieve the suffering of beings. We'll read again these lines, these lines of aspiration, our highest aspiration, this great understanding. *Opening our heart wide, we turn to the perfect highest awakening. We are resolved to attain understanding, to realize deep love and compassion, to practice diligently, transforming our own suffering and that of all species. All the merits of body, speech, and mind I want to direct to be part of the happiness of all people and all species. That is my deepest desire. Apart from the bodhicitta, apart from the thirst for great understanding, apart from the vow to love deeply, I have no more desires.* I touch the earth; I bow down; I say that I don't have any little desires. I reveal everything in me for the Buddha to see. All Buddhas in the ten directions and in the three times have offered up their merit like this. We have learned the ten vows, the aspirations of Samantabhadra. We know how Samantabhadra offered up merit, and all Buddhas have done that too. We also go on the path of these Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and so we offer up the merit too. Today we wish to offer up our merit also. I'm just taking the steps after the Buddha. *We repent of all our faults, and offer up all the merit to the ocean of immeasurable merit and to the towering mountain of highest understanding*. Our highest aim is great understanding, so we offer up all our merit to this great understanding, *Maha Prajna.* The ocean of immeasurable merit is at the same time the towering mountain of highest understanding because all of the good things we have done in the past we offer up to that highest understanding. The Buddhas and the Patriarchal Teachers are the light that shows the way. We see clearly our path. That path has been traversed by the Buddha, by the Patriarchal Teachers, and they light the way of that path for us. In this solemn moment, with all my life's force, I come back to myself to take refuge in the Three Jewels. If I am successful with my life in this lifespan, I will be successful with my next lifespan.

On Sunday we will study the *Sutra on Knowing the Better Way to Live Alone* and then the *Sutra on the Prajna Paramita*. We have this in English; you should read it. We have it in Chinese too; we've been studying it in Chinese. You should read this before I talk about it on Sunday.

[End of Dharma Talk]